

STONE MEN OF MALEKULA

AUTHOR'S ACCOUNT

584

Betrothal. Young girl proposed for by the suitor's parents.

It is usual for a girl to be betrothed to a man, or literally "retained" (*sutu ghore*)¹ by him, when she is in about her sixth or seventh year. A man chooses the girl he wants to marry, but negotiations are carried out exclusively between the respective parents, the girl herself not being consulted. The proposal is made by the suitor's father or mother, one of whom goes to the girl's father and says, "Wouldn't it be a good thing if my son were to marry your daughter?" If the father agrees, an appointment is made for two or three days later, when the suitor's parents (still not the suitor himself) return, bringing with them a single pig, of any size up to that of a crescent-tusker, and ten or twenty money-mats. By this payment the girl is officially "retained." The new set of kinship terms resulting from the proposed alliance are immediately adopted, and at every subsequent feast or ceremony held in their respective villages the suitor and the girl's parents must present to one another the customary pigs, as if the girl were already married. Needless to say, the balance of gain is strongly on the side of the prospective parents-in-law.

[60]

Bride-price.

583

When the girl has arrived at the proper age, negotiations are entered into concerning the bride-price. The pigs which the suitor proposes to pay are displayed to the girl's father, who usually objects that they are not many or good enough. The suitor then produces others. In the haggling that follows the prospective father-in-law has completely the whip-hand. If he is still dissatisfied with the proposed bride-price he will say, "Never mind, my daughter can wait," and the suitor and his family are sent scouring the country, to bargain or beg for yet further pigs from their friends. They cannot protest or threaten not to take the girl away, for they would then lose not only the pigs paid at betrothal, but also all those presented to her father at every subsequent rite.

Bride left with her husband. Payment.

• 585

At last the price is agreed upon, and the suitor's parents (still not the suitor himself) go to the girl's father and appoint a day when he shall come and leave his daughter with her new husband. This is called *sutulo ni*, "he conducts her." On the appointed day the girl's Lodge-brothers come to the suitor, bringing a basket of yams for each pig that is to be paid. Returning home, they oil and decorate the bride and she

¹ Compare the name of the betrothal rite recorded by Codrington from Oba and called *huhu vuhu goroi* meaning "to give her suck with a drinking coconut and secure her" (Codrington, 3, p. 241).

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

193

partakes of a farewell pudding cooked by her mother.¹ Then, with her face painted red and herself now carrying a basket of yams, she is escorted to the house of the bridegroom. The pigs are handed over one by one without ceremony, beginning with the smallest, and distributed among the bride's relatives. If the last and biggest has attained the size of re-entrant-tusker, a conch-shell trumpet is blown. The bride is now left with her husband. Formerly he would have already built a house for her, but with the incipient disintegration of native culture he is now, as a rule, too lazy, and the couple live together either in his own house or in that of his father while he slowly constructs a new one. [585] [591]

GODEFROY'S ACCOUNT

Godefroy's account² is longer and more graphic, and, while omitting some of my facts, contains others omitted in my record. [594]

Words used for "marry."

To express the act of marrying they use a word, the root of which is common in almost all dialects, namely *lage*, together with the corresponding substantives *lagean*.³ This is the true word meaning "to marry" or "marriage." In Vao there is a second word, which does not appear to go to the bottom of the matter as does the first, but which indicates rather the symbolic gesture, namely *tuka*, "lead into the house" (a native takes a woman into his house only in the case of marriage). When one hears the words "*Mal-kali mo tuka vavine*," literally "Mal-kali has led a woman," everyone knows that this means "Mal-kali has just been married, he has taken a woman." 196

Betrothal.

This is how the natives perform the marriage contract. Let us take a typical case. Melte-sale is a young man 18 or 20 years old; his parents have decided that the time has come for him to marry. They themselves choose the spouse, a girl who has been nubile for a year or two. They make their decision known to the young man. If he makes no objection, this is a sign that the choice pleases, and that he agrees.⁴ 584.

¹ Speiser (3, p. 295) states that if the bride is still very young she is provided with false breasts made of painted coconut shells. False breasts made in this way are worn by young men taking the part of women in the *na-leng* mumming plays described on p. 338 of this volume, but I never heard of them being worn by young brides. Speiser states also that the bride's mother on this occasion places a yam on the girl's lap as a fertility symbol.

² Godefroy, 1, 1933, pp. 117-21. Paragraph headings and footnotes are mine.

³ My spelling of these words is *lagh* and *laghean* (see p. 133). Cf. Mota *lag*, "to marry"; *lagia*, "marriage."

⁴ Elsewhere, however, and contrary to my information, Godefroy says, "It is the mother's brother who makes it his business to find his sister's son a wife, whom he himself chooses."

STONE MEN OF MALEKULA

584

The ceremony of betrothal consists in a presentation by the young man's parents to the girl's relatives of several pigs and three or four pounds in English money,¹ saying, "*Kam tuto gore*,"² "We have retained her." The news immediately spreads, and from this moment the betrothed girl becomes taboo; she is now under the vigilant watch of her future husband and of his parents. The betrothal is always accompanied by a feast.

Date fixed for the wedding. Pigs and yams collected.

583

Several months later, a date is fixed after the coming yam harvest, when the marriage ceremony is to take place. Meanwhile, the young man's clansmen, his father, father's brothers, his own brothers, his paternal cousins, toil to collect the twenty or so tusked boars and the thirty or forty pounds which will be necessary to pay for the girl.³ On their side, the girl's relatives go to their gardens every day to dig up the desired number of yams—two or three hundred. These yams are brought to the young man's village and stored on great yam-tables constructed from bamboos in the form of a platform; this platform rests on stakes, about three feet from the ground, in order to preserve the yams from the ravages of the pigs which roam over the island. The young man's people also dig yams, but in smaller quantity.

Preparations for the wedding. Decoration of yam poles.

585

One or two weeks before the appointed day, the men, youths and boys set about energetically cutting bamboo poles, to which each individual's share of the yams will be attached. These bamboo poles, about twelve feet long, are garlanded with wild flowers, dark red, with strong, almost fadeless petals, called *lok-lok*.⁴

Each works at his allotted task, and the preparations for the ceremony advance. All of a sudden, it is announced that the great occasion is fixed for the day following the next full moon; there are only two days left. Orders are given to keep the pigs ready for delivery; others are given to complete the decorating of the bamboo poles. These famous bamboo poles are arranged thus. The young men, with a hibiscus flower or two jauntily stuck into their hair on one side of their heads, carry the poles to the front of the husband's house; one end is cut so as to form a fork. An arm's length below the fork are attached two or three yams, according to the rank of him, or of those, for whom they are intended; then, between the yams and the fork, they tie on the red *lok-lok* flower; to this

¹ Replacing the ceremonial mats (*mangau*) still in use during my investigations.

² Godefroy's *tuto gore* is equivalent to my *tutu ghore* (see p. 192).

³ Compare the ten pigs said by Harrison (2, p. 26) to compose the bride-price at Matanavat. But this is a vague statement, as neither the rank nor value of the pigs is given.

⁴ *Amaranthus*.

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

195

are added branches of many-coloured crotons. When the toilet is finished, the bamboos are arranged regularly leaning against the branch of a tree, the decorated end on top, and the other resting on the ground. If the relatives are numerous, thirty or forty such trophies may be counted. In front of this array of bamboos and lying on the ground are fifty or sixty packets of yams carefully wrapped in dry banana leaves also decorated with *lok-lok* flowers. 585

Three-quarters of these yams are furnished by the bride's relatives. When everything has been so arranged, the view is an enchanting one from the natives' point of view, especially when a bright sun brings out the lively colouring of the crotons and *lok-lok* flowers. . . .

Morning of wedding day. Pigs for bride-price assembled.

All these preparations take place during the morning. There is a ceaseless and excited coming and going while the married women bring loads of yams and the young men decorate the bamboos. Now the sun is at its zenith; now is the time for the adult men. They are full of affairs; some cut the stakes to which the pigs are to be tied, while others, more numerous, lead in the "lord pigs,"¹ dragging them by a rope tied round one of their fore-feet (which the natives call "arms"). There are numberless pigs, and they raise every possible obstruction on the way; they seem in a bad humour: doubtless they have been well lodged, well fed, and now they have to change masters. Some waddle along in a leisurely way; as if used to the manoeuvre; they have had to change hands so many times! What odds can it make once more or less! . . .

At last they arrive in the enclosure in front of the bridegroom's house, and are tied up here in the shade, for they detest the full heat of the sun.

As soon as the masters of ceremony have ascertained that the agreed bride-price in pigs is assembled, they begin to set out the pigs in the correct order. The first stake, that nearest the house, is destined for the most valuable boar, usually one of which the tusks have not only made a complete circle, but are also three-quarters of the way round towards completing a second; such a tusker has a marketable value of £50 or £60 in English money; this pig will go to the bride's father or her nearest living male relative in the paternal line. After this prize follow six *bouar*,² boars of which the tusks have made one complete circle and the third of another; each of these is worth £20. After this, four or five pigs of lesser value are

¹ I.e. consecrated tusked boars of high rank (see p. 259).

² Evidently the *bo-ware* of my list (see p. 243). The enormous increase in the value of the bride-price that has occurred during the past twenty years is commented on in Layard, 5, p. 349. Elsewhere he mentions a girl of 14 whose bride-price consisted of twenty-three tuskers, of which one was a circle-tusker valued at £40, another was worth £16 and the rest £1 to £4 each. He calculated that the total value of pigs was about £80, and of the yams about £5. (Letter to his mother, dated August 24th, 1925.)

STONE MEN OF MALEKULA

585 aligned at the foot of the poles; lastly, a good two dozen young pigs, of no great value, lousy, ill-made, etc., make their way with a debauched air towards the remaining very inferior stakes which are just good enough for them; they will soon be delivered, without ceremony, to the bride's young cousins and more distant relatives.

While the more lordly tuskers are being carefully tied up, the crowd of witnesses is already pressing forward towards the front of the enclosure. All admire the great boars, tuskers of noble rank, discussing whence they have come, for one came from a distant isle and called for the manning of a great whale-boat¹ with a crew of twelve.

The rows of bamboos, with their bunches of yams and their bouquets of red *lok-lok* flowers, standing almost vertically with their heads garlanded with croton leaves whose colours shine brilliant under the noonday sun, form a triumphal background to this brave scene. . . . The assembled company awaits, in festive mood, the solemn moment which is about to occur.

Arrival of bride, with face painted vermilion, accompanied by female maternal relatives.

Suddenly, at one end of the enclosure, the assembled onlookers part to make way for someone. What can it be? The rest of the crowd, kept in their places by the row of pigs and yams, lean forward to look; they have no need to move; it is the bride, with her family; a young girl moving with easy gait and natural demeanour, just a little proud at the sight of such wealth of which she is the cause, advances towards a spot reserved for her. Her whole face is painted a bright vermilion, the supreme pigment, expression of the most perfect beauty. . . . She is followed by a suite, being accompanied by her mother, her grandmother,² her aunts, her cousins, her sisters and several friends; all these seat themselves around her. . . .

Bride-price distributed among bride's relatives.

At the same moment, as if obeying a signal, the bride's male relatives rise and form a compact group around her. Then the bridegroom's eldest brother advances and, untying the smallest pig from the row, calls out the name of one of the bride's relatives. All the bride's relatives receive in this manner part of the payment for her, and each acknowledges that he has been given a pig of the correct grade according to his degree of kinship with her. The presentation begins with the pigs of least value, for the sake of leaving those of noble grade to the last. As each takes into his hand the rope to which his captive property is tied, all the male relatives depart to their own houses, each one dragging his share in the prize by its foot. It is now the women's turn. To them are

¹ Substitute for the old sea-going canoe (see p. 456).

² Godefroy's use of kinship terms is not very exact.

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

197

distributed—each one being called by name—the yams piled on the ground. The tall decorated bamboo poles are assigned to those families which are most closely related to the bride. Each family takes its departure as soon as it has received its share; this filing past of guests presents an interesting and animated scene . . . the rite has cast an air of festivity both over the scene and over the people; a traditional act has been performed and no hitch has occurred; the people are pleased.

Ancestors.

"The ancestors, if they see us, will be satisfied with us, because we have accomplished it well." This is the question after every rite: "Are the ancestors satisfied with what we have just done?" "Yes, because we have done as they did." Their greatest spiritual pleasure comes from this declaration: "Our ancestors are satisfied with us because we do as they did: we continue [their work]."

Bride's female maternal relatives invited to wedding feast, but refuse, and leave.

While each one is returning to his home, dragging his pig or carrying her load of yams, while the young boys gather the gay flowers that have fallen from the tall bamboos to adorn their heads, while the noise of the crowd grows distant and becomes diffused, what has become of the pretty wife, the young bride with her scarlet paint, whom the sight of so much riches just now made so proud? And her ladies-in-waiting, where are they? Neither she nor her little court of grave matrons have moved; they are still sitting in a circle in the same place. But here comes a crowd to visit them. These are the mothers, the grandmothers,¹ the aunts, the sisters and the female cousins of the young husband who come to invite them to a grand wedding feast this same evening. Thereupon, those seated all rise; the bride's mother makes her excuses, the grandmothers and aunts likewise; have they not to prepare supper for their lords and masters, and that now?

The young wife now takes tender leave of her mother, and of all her maternal relatives; tears flow on all sides without the slightest effort; they all press her hands, cover the young wife with touching and sincere caresses, and finally go.

Bride formally appropriated by husband's clan.

Then the husband's relatives surround the young girl, and lead her in front of the house of a widow,² closely related to the husband. It is this act of appropriation of the newly married girl by her husband's clan, an act to which she herself consents, which signifies her acquiescence in the new state of life imposed upon her; soon she will give open proof of

¹ See note 2, p. 196.

² It is not clear who this relative is. Probably the wife of a deceased father's brother or father's father.

585 her consent by drying her tears and preparing to take a joyful part in the wedding feast.

This willing participation in the feast, together with the quiet sleep the following night, which she passes in the married women's quarters,¹ are the final and clear expression of the complete acceptance of her married state by the young wife and her maternal relatives; . . . the young girl has gracefully accepted the feast which has been prepared, and she has passed a good night with her new female relatives. . . . The marriage is now a fact.

The wedding feast. Men and women eat separately, but within sight of one another.

The wedding feast is held in the women's quarters already mentioned. The young husband makes sure that all is well there, and then turns his attention to the corresponding feast for the male element of his clan, his father's brothers, his brothers, and his male paternal cousins. When all is ready, he cries "*Ra gen-gan te*," "Let us eat." The men sit down around their *na-longk* [pudding], made of yams and pork; the women, on their side, do the same. During the meal the husband casts frequent glances towards his young wife. He notes how modestly she sits, taking her part in the feast with ease and complete lack of shyness; so all goes well, and he is happy.²

Dance from nightfall to midnight. Bride sleeps with married women for the next month, after which she goes to her husband.

At nightfall there is a dance,³ and towards midnight each one goes home to sleep. Then the married women take the young bride to their Lodge, and with them she spends the night. For a whole month she continues to sleep with them, after which the husband leads his young wife to a new house he has constructed for her, close to his own, the two roofs touching one another.

AUTHOR'S ACCOUNT (continued)

Bride returns home for five days.

On the fifth or tenth day after the marriage⁴ the husband and his friends conduct the young wife back to her father's house, presenting him with a small pig. This pig is called *warehi bang-na-im*, of which the literal

¹ It is not clear what this means, whether the women's Lodge, or the house of some elderly female relative, wife of a member of the clan.

² This whole paragraph is very obscure. Men eat together in their Quarter- or Family-Lodge, from which no woman's house can be seen. Can it be that the writer is here referring to a feast in the Mission grounds?

³ The type of dance is not specified, nor where it takes place.

⁴ I.e. while still under her month's probation in the married women's quarters.

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

199

translation is "he hands her back to her own Quarter." Here she remains five days, at the end of which time her father brings her back again to her husband, bringing with him a basket of yams in return for each of the pigs which made up the bride-price.

ADULTERY

A woman taken in adultery runs the risk of being killed on the spot, if her husband is so minded, and no one will blame him. Godefroy describes a former form of revenge: "A small pebble of lava would be made red-hot, and used to brand the unhappy woman's body; nine times out of ten, this would result in her death."¹

A male adulterer is similarly liable, in principle, to be punished by death by the relatives of the outraged woman. . . . As a rule he escapes by payment of a heavy fine to the injured husband, in the form of a tusked boar.

TREATMENT OF WIVES WHO RUN AWAY

As a rule, marriages are stable, especially after the birth of children. There are, however, in the earlier years of marriage, fairly frequent cases in which the wife runs away, either on account of the husband's cruelty, or simply because she prefers someone else. When such flights from the home become more than the husband feels he can put up with, three remedies are possible:

- (1) He may forcibly detain her by physical means.
- (2) She may take refuge with another man.
- (3) She may return to her own people, and, ultimately, a divorce may be arranged.

(1) *Forcible detention by physical means.*

Forcible detention is among the ugly features of Small Island culture, frequently alluded to among white men as a proof of the despicable nature of the natives. So far as my experience goes, such cases are rare, and could not take place if the wife's near relatives were alive and exercised effectively their right of interference.² One of the stock stories one hears is that of a man hamstringing his wife. Godefroy records yet another method:

"Rorin-mal is well known for his ungovernable temper; he has two wives, Le-mbe and Le-rak-rak, each of whom is jealous of the other. When Le-mbe is in the ascendant, Le-rak-rak sulks and disappears for days. Last year Rorin-mal, tired of her continued flights, resolved on a method of obtaining, with regard to her, a few months' peace. Unwinding a roll of plaited coconut sinnet, he seized her, tied her hands

¹ Godefroy, I, 1933, p. 127.

² See p. 173.